

Electronic Testimony Against Governor's S.B. No. 19 An Act Establishing the Transit Corridor  
Development Assistance Authority

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

As a resident of Bristol, Connecticut, I am deeply concerned regarding the creation of a new state authority to organize and oversee the implementation of new urbanism strategies in cities and towns with rail infrastructure across the state. First and foremost, the very reason for establishing this agency raises alarms. According to one Council of Governments Director's testimony for the original bill, (hb6851), it's formation arose due to the frustration of some, that the agenda to regionally urbanize some cities was not moving fast enough. This should raise alarms in the minds of board members. Home rule jurisdiction of zoning and planning remains in the hands of the municipality despite the frustration of any whom think their greater good is worthy of usurpation of that authority.

Despite assurances otherwise, with this new wording of this revised bill, and the inclusion of the work "assistance", the threats to home rule remain. This newly formed Transit Corridor Authority will be just that, an Authority, whether it's final form is brought about incrementally, or at once. The softening of the language regarding Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and removing the power of eminent domain has little significance, as MOUs hold no legal commitment. Furthermore, the Department of Transportation, whom already holds the power of eminent domain, would have sitting members on this newly created defacto government agency. Are the concerned residents of Connecticut to believe that the goal to dominate decision-making within a half mile radius of any BRT or train station has been removed because of the addition of this new soft language?

As it stands, our state's regional planning agencies have now evolved into Councils of Governments involved with economic development. Financial allocations to these entities has become law and only fiscal restraint has impeded it's continued evolution. It would appear that under the current economic conditions, many municipalities have effectually been backed into a corner with the state's responsible growth mandates. Although described by interested parties as providing nothing but benefits to the communities, new urbanism is often detrimental to the well being of the city by leading to increased crime, higher social services costs, escalating rent prices, higher rates of taxation, among many other risks. By tying housing development to economic development grant allocations, municipalities striving to compete economically with surrounding towns in a state without growth are concentrating poverty through this process.

This effort to encourage municipalities to do things that they normally would not do, (commonly described as using "carrots and sticks"), is well described in the 2007 State of Connecticut Legislative Review Committee Report on regional organizations. In the report, it is stated that municipalities may be reluctant to join regional endeavors until they "reach a financial tipping point." It seems that many municipalities have reached that point, and municipal aid cuts are currently on the table. Does the State of Connecticut really need a bigger stick?

Let us not forget the lessons as to why county government was abolished in the state in 1960. As stated by famed economist Milton Friedman, "Concentrated power is not rendered harmless by the good intentions of those whom create it." A Transit Corridor Authority would possess the power to perform the same task as the Councils of Governments, but would do so in a top-down fashion. I question the premise of an state authority working in the collective interests of the state providing unbiased advice to officials elected to represent a city or town. There is no room for the application of sovereign interest in such an arrangement. What we already lack in the state is an intent to inform municipalities of the risks. The closer that these decisions are made at the local level, the better chance that the residents have a chance to be informed of the risks. As an advocate of transparent and representative government, I strongly oppose the creation of this state appointed authority.

Thank You for Your Consideration,

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